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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E, AND CA/OCS/ACS/AF:J.MARKEY  
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/21/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [CASC](#) [KPAO](#) [ET](#)  
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: ADMIRAL FALLON AND PRIME MINISTER MELES  
ON SECURITY CHALLENGES

REF: ADDIS ABABA 1308

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASON: 1.4 (A), (B), AND (D).

¶1. (S/NF) At the conclusion of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Admiral William J. Fallon's discussion with Prime Minister Meles on May 11 (septel), Admiral Fallon and the Ambassador (note-taker) spoke in private with the Prime Minister as other participants left the room. Admiral Fallon raised with the Prime Minister the recent detention of two U.S. soldiers (and an American citizen contractor serving as a translator) by the Ethiopian military caught in an area declared "off-limits" by the Embassy as a result of the April 24 killings of Chinese and Ethiopian oil workers (reftel) by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). While the two soldiers were released quickly, the contractor remains detained and is now a consular case, since he is not protected under the SOFA agreement.

¶2. (S/NF) Admiral Fallon assured the Prime Minister that a full investigation was taking place as to why the team was in an off-limits area and what they were doing in the area. Admiral Fallon related that in an earlier meeting with the Chief of Defense, Lieutenant General Samora Yonus, the General claimed that the team gave conflicting comments of who they were, why they were in the area, and why they were carrying so much equipment (weapons, cameras, GPS), thus their detention. The General originally suspected that the three Americans were not U.S. military and that they were either trying to contact the ONLF or provide assistance to the ONLF. There were reports, according to the General, that New York Times reporters were in the area trying to secretly contact the ONLF. Admiral Fallon stressed to the Prime Minister that the U.S. military is not conducting any illegal activities or operations secretly in Ethiopia without the knowledge of the Ethiopian Government, and, more important, the U.S. military was not and does not seek to contact the ONLF. Such contacts are unauthorized. The Admiral again assured the Prime Minister that a full investigation of the team's activities was being conducted.

¶3. (S/NF) The Prime Minister noted efforts by the Ethiopian military against the ONLF in the aftermath of the killings of Chinese and Ethiopian oil workers in the Ogaden region (reftel) where the U.S. team was detained. The actions by the ONLF against foreigners was a surprise, and the Prime

Minister noted that his troops were taking immediate action to apprehend the killers and to enhance security in the region.

¶4. (S/NF) COMMENT: The Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) is reviewing the rules of engagement and procedure of operations for the J2X teams, and is conducting an investigation on the team that was detained. COMUSCENTCOM has suspended all J2X activities in HOA pending completion of the investigation. The case of the detained American contractor is being handled by the U.S. Embassy consular section, since this American citizen is not a U.S. military personnel protected under any U.S.-Ethiopian military bilateral treaty or agreement. (NOTE: Consular officer has received GOE permission to visit Amcit week of May 21. END NOTE.)

¶5. (S/NF) COMMENT CONTINUED: What is extremely troubling is that we learned subsequently that there were indeed three New York Times reporters who had entered Ethiopia privately the week of May 7 and were interviewing the ONLF for over a week. This was the same time that this three-member team from the U.S. military was detained by the Ethiopian military. The mix-up in identities placed the U.S. military team in a potentially dangerous situation. The Ethiopian military assumed that the rumor of New York Times reporters could have been a ploy for a team to spy for or help the ONLF carry out further terrorist attacks. What made the situation all the more dangerous was that the New York Times reporters gave specific orders to their staff and office not to inform the U.S. Embassy of their activities. While the New York Times reporters were picked up safely by the Ethiopian military (septel), their actions could have had potentially devastating results from the reporters being kidnapped or

killed by the ONLF to our U.S. military team being harmed. The actions of the New York Times did, however, place U.S. military personnel in harm's way. END COMMENT.

¶6. (U) Admiral Fallon has reviewed this cable.  
YAMAMOTO